

Client Worksheet 10

Tricks of the OCD Con Artist

OCD is a con artist and a very good one and much better than a standard sales person. OCD is far more dynamic; easily adapting to new situations, using every trick in the book to make you doubt reality. Just think about it for a moment. OCD has not benefited you in any way, you feel the consequences of having OCD all the time and, yet, you are still buying its wares. OCD is a con man and a brilliant one at that.

To stand a chance against OCD, you will have to begin seeing through its tricks by identifying them and how they strengthen/reinforce your OCD. To do this, the first thing to remember is where the tricks of the OCD are located.

They are part of your own OCD story and your inner dialogue in the form of thoughts, beliefs, associations and anything else that makes you doubt. They are those ideas and thoughts that somehow give credibility to your obsessional doubt. The second thing to remember is that it is never about the *content* of these beliefs, thoughts and facts. It is about how you apply these thoughts in a situation that is not really relevant and often in contradiction to reality.

These two points are something you have already learned in the previous sessions. The new point; however, is to see how OCD is often able to get around these two facts by using all manner of tricks- which always come down to the same thing. Seeing how it always comes down to the same thing will help you expose the OCD con artist in a way that would be difficult to do if you were to debate with every little thought association and idea OCD comes up with. So, the first point is to never argue with OCD. It's much better to simply see why what it tells you is wrong and then move on to spend your time on better things.

The one thing that all of the tricks of OCD have in common is that *they make you believe its arguments have something to do with reality while they do not*. Each time you get into the OCD Bubble, OCD will have accomplished just that. For example, one of the tricks of OCD is to make you believe that you are actually going deeper into reality when listening to OCD. It may tell you that you are contaminated because, if you would just look with a microscope, it would be obvious. Likewise, it may tell you that the door may not be locked because the hidden mechanism behind the lock might be broken.

Alternatively, if you suffer from pure obsessions, OCD may tell you that even though there is no evidence that you have violent impulses, they might be there if only you would look deeper into your mind or into some hypothetical unconscious. In all of these instances, OCD makes it seem like you are going deeper into reality, when it is the opposite. Can you see how OCD is one slippery eel?

There are many tricks that OCD uses, but do not let yourself be confused. Whatever the trick, OCD will always try to convince you that your doubt has something to do with reality when it does not. Below, we have described some of the many tricks OCD uses. See if you are familiar with any of them.

Mismatching

Mismatching is a very common trick of OCD to confuse you. OCD will often propose all sorts of events that have happened elsewhere or that happened to someone else in order to make your doubt somehow more

credible in the here and now. For example, if you have obsessions about locking the door, OCD might say something like, “My friend often drives off and forgets to lock his garage door, so mine might also be unlocked.” Or, if the doubt were about being poisoned, it might say something like, “I heard about poisonous medicine one time, so my food could be poisoned.” The trick of OCD is that it uses all manner of apparently comparable events and irrelevant associations to justify the doubt. It makes it appear as if your doubt is relevant to reality.

Yet, none of these are relevant at all to the here and now. There is a *mismatch* between your own actual circumstances and these events. It is like a car salesman telling you to get rid of your old car because he had a car of the same model and it broke down. Such arguments make no sense when your car is functioning fine. Another aspect of mismatching is blending, where OCD blends OCD thinking and behavior with a sometime noble or desired, but unrelated, attribute such as being “perfect,” “ecological,” or “safe.”

Out-of-Context Facts

OCD is often very selective in how it applies information to your situation. It often comes up with facts, to give credibility to the doubt. For example, OCD might say something like “Microbes do exist,” therefore “There might be microbes infecting my hand” or “People die unexpectedly all the time so I might die now.” Such facts are often not incorrect, which is why they are so powerful in making you take the doubt seriously. However, they still do not have anything to do with reality in the here and now. While the facts themselves may be true, but as applied in your situation they are false. These facts are used by OCD entirely out of context and have nothing to do with here and now. When OCD uses out-of-context facts, it actually uses two tricks at once. Not only does it use mismatching but, at the same time, it uses facts that seem so very true. It’s one of the more powerful tricks in the arsenal of OCD because it combines two tricks at once.

Living the Fear

Another trick of OCD is that it can *simulate* reality, as if there is actually sense information in the here and now that justifies the doubt. That is because the OCD story can be so convincing that you actually begin to experience the story as if it was real. But just because you are able to imagine something does not make it real. For example, if OCD convinced you that you are ill, then you might actually start feeling nauseous and weak. Or, if OCD convinced you that you might be sexual deviant, then you might imagine being like a sexual deviant so vividly that it makes you feel like you are one. Under these circumstances, it can be difficult to tell what is real and what is not. The key to remember here is that these feelings come *after* you start to doubt and worry. They are the result of your doubt, not the cause of it. They are not real even if it seems like they are.

Going Deep

OCD is not deep even though it may present itself this way. Often, OCD tries to go beyond reality by making it seem like it is going deep into reality while, in fact, the opposite is happening. It *always* takes you away from reality. For example, as mentioned earlier, OCD might try to justify that your hands are contaminated and that there are germs on your hands by saying that if you would look with a microscope, it would be obvious that you are contaminated. But such arguments do not go deep into reality but, instead,

deeper into your imagination. So, when OCD presents something that seems deep, realize that the opposite is the case. OCD is really quite superficial.

Reverse Reasoning

Upside-down reasoning is a key trick of OCD. Normally, when we reason, we start with an observation in reality and then come to a conclusion about what is there. For example, if you see a door hinge coming loose, you might justifiably doubt that the door is locked properly. OCD often turns this reasoning completely upside down. It starts with an idea, or fact, and then comes to a conclusion about what is there. It is a bit of a bully approach where reality does not come into the picture at all. It might say, “People have walked on this floor, therefore it is dirty.” This is similar to saying, “Automobiles break down all the time, therefore mine is probably broken as well.”

Distrust of the Senses or Self

Finally, the most frequently used trick of OCD is that it makes you distrust your senses or your own self. It is the lifeblood of OCD. If you trust in your senses or your own self, OCD cannot exist. The obsession simply makes no sense if you were to take reality into account. Yet, OCD will always try to convince you that you need to leave the world of the senses behind and find resolution to a problem that is not really there.

Double Jeopardy

This is a nasty trick whereby OCD gets you not because you tried to ignore it but exactly because you obeyed it. The principle here is OCD gets you if you do and if you don't. For example, you might go back and check that the light that was switched off because OCD said it might not be off. Now you're feeling reassured because it was off (as your senses and common sense told you all the time) but that feeling often does not last long. OCD now comes back with, “Ah, it was OK before you checked it, but now after you've checked it you may have broken the switch and made it unsafe.”

Again, We Come Back to Testing it Out

A trick noted before is for OCD to provoke a testing behavior. For example, Matthew fears he may be gay. So, he finds photos of attractive guys to test himself for any physical response. OCD then says, “Aha! You must be gay for having looked at the photos.”

Let's Discuss It

Another trick is for OCD to invite you to discuss and consider your doubt as a way of resolving it. You start to doubt your common sense in the face of sensory evidence. But just as you are about to dismiss it, OCD jumps in with, “Well, we really should consider this doubt, what does it mean, how it can be resolved. Let's consider it together and ruminate about it over and over and over again.”

We alert you to all of these tricks above so that you can spot the OCD sales pitch not by trying to argue with it, but by simply seeing how its tricks make your doubts irrelevant and false.

But Maybe This Time...

Another OCD argument is, “Yes, but maybe this time the doubt is founded.” Whatever OCD has predicted in the past has never materialized. Normally this fact would be sufficient for you to have no more dealings with OCD. Afterall, if every item you bought from a shop was broken, you would probably not buy anymore. But, OCD with its trade mark “maybe” gets to you with “well maybe this time.” Since this “maybe” resembles all the other false maybes in the past, there is no reason to treat it differently.

But Maybe Later...

In a similar vein, OCD may threaten consequences not in the present but later. This distant threat poses a particular problem with obsessions where the client may be convinced that a catastrophe could befall them, not now, but weeks, months or years later. Clearly, the threat cannot be disproved by reality testing since it is in the future. However, this “maybe later” is an obsessional doubt construed in exactly the same way as other obsessional doubts and hence is equally irrelevant.

Client Exercise 10

Tricks of the OCD Con Artist

The goal of this week's exercise is to learn how to better identify and counter the tricks and cheats of the OCD. Remember, you never argue with the OCD. Rather than analyzing the relative merits of an OCD argument better to see how the argument is flawed right from the start. It is never about there being a small likelihood that the arguments for the doubt may be correct, but the particular way this doubt comes about. That is, the obsessional story takes you away from reality, which makes the OCD always irrelevant and false even if it is possible in a very abstract sense. If you still have problems with this idea, then you will need to address this issue with your therapist.

Now, take out your OCD story, and write down each sentence or partial sentence in your story. Each of those sentences contain a specific trick or cheat the OCD uses to convince you it is real. Next, using the accompanying worksheet, write down which of the tricks or cheats apply to each sentence in your story. First write down the trick or cheat that best applies. Often, other tricks and cheats will apply as well, which you can write down as second or third.

To make this a bit easier, first look at the following example given previously of someone who thinks her hands could be dirty and so she must wash her hands:

Example 1

So, I say to myself: "Well, my kids were playing outside and I know it's dirty outside. I've seen the dirt on the pavement and I think they may have touched something dirty."

Selective out-of-context facts (over-reliance as possibility)

"They picked up something from the street and, if they are dirty, then I'm going to be dirty, too."

Mismatching (category error)

"And, I'm going to make the house dirty. I imagine the house dirty and my dirty hands, so I start to feel dirty."

Absorption in the imagination (living the fearful consequences)

"So, I go and wash my hands and I can't stop washing. It's like a voice in my head saying over and over again, you're dirty, even though I'm washing and see nothing dirty on my hands."

How quickly were you able to dismiss the different elements in this contamination story? Were you able to see how each of the tricks of OCD apply here? If this OCD story is different from your own, then it should be easier to dismiss it as irrelevant.

This is what you are striving for with your own OCD story. Try to do the same thing and write down each of the tricks that apply to the different elements in your own OCD story.

In addition, the exercise on your training card focuses on real-life situations where you find yourself having a doubt. Each time an obsession or doubt occurs, you will be asked to (1) uncover the trick of underlying the doubt, (2) see how this trick makes the doubt irrelevant and wrong, (3) remember your alternative non-OCD story to replace the obsessional doubt, and (4) dismiss the doubt. The whole exercise should last no longer than 1–2 minutes each time. Don't forget that OCD will want you to think it over one more time or two more times....three....but it will never be enough. If you find yourself doing that, then OCD has already lured you into OCD land with yet another trick. Eventually, however, you will be able to see all of the tricks, at which point OCD will give up all together.

Client Training Card 10

Tricks of the OCD Con Artist

Learning Points

OCD uses its tricks to make it *appear* that your obsession has something do with reality when, in fact, it only takes you further away from reality.

The tricks of OCD include *mismatching, living the fear, out of context facts, reverse reasoning, double jeopardy, testing it out, going deep, and a distrust of the senses (or self)*.

Your non-obsessional story brings you closer to what is really there since it is in accord with reality.

Seeing through the tricks of the OCD con artist will make the OCD disappear.

Daily Exercise

- Each time an obsessional doubt occurs, identify the specific OCD trick that gave rise to the doubt.
- Realize how this trick makes the doubt false and irrelevant.
- Imagine vividly how the situation would feel if the non-OCD story applies.
- Let go of the obsessional doubt after you develop the non-OCD story. The non-OCD story is the only thing that is real.

Client Quiz 10

Tricks of the OCD Con Artist

1. The tricks of OCD are...
 - convincing.
 - part of my OCD story.
 - too difficult to catch.
 - none of the above.

2. Mismatching can consist of...
 - matching up two different unrelated categories.
 - an irrelevant association.
 - using out-of-context facts in your OCD story.
 - all of the above.

3. Living the fear...
 - can overwhelm you emotionally.
 - makes it difficult to tell the difference between reality and imagination.
 - occurs after you have already begun to doubt.
 - all of the above.

4. Going deep...
 - reveals the true nature of reality.
 - is just another thought removing you further from reality.
 - makes your OCD more profound.
 - all of the above.

5. Blending occurs when...
 - a positive term is mixed up with an OCD behavior.
 - you agree with the OCD.
 - you perform a series of rituals.
 - you disguise your OCD.

6. To counter the OCD con artist...
 - you look at its arguments from every angle.
 - you see how the arguments do not relate to reality in here and now.
 - you argue as best as you can with it.
 - none of the above.